

BOUQUETS IN TEXTILES



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IN TEXTILES

*An Introduction to the
Textile Arts*

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COVER DESIGN from a Reserve printed cotton, French, late 18th—early 19th century.
934.4.448. The Harry Wearne Collection. Gift of Mrs. Harry Wearne

INTRODUCTION

SINCE ancient times flowers have been a favourite motif for decoration of all kinds, but it was not until quite recently that they became a dominating feature in textile design.

Beginning about the 16th century and continuing down to the present day, the use of flowers is exemplified in the painted, printed, and woven textiles, the laces and embroideries made in Europe or for the European market. These are well represented in the Textile Collections of the Royal Ontario Museum, and the aim of this small book is to introduce the reader to them by means of a series of short essays, each illustrated with a textile bouquet in the Museum's collections.

The illustrations vary enormously. Some form the central design of the textile from which they are taken, others are secondary motifs to a quite different design; some are large, some quite small. Not all will be found on exhibition at one time. The collections are larger than can be accommodated in the Textile Galleries and therefore exhibits are rotated, but by enquiring in the Textile Study Room any piece can be seen which is not on exhibition.

While each bouquet illustrated has many of the characteristics typical of the period to which it belongs and the technique in which it was made, a visit to the Textile Galleries and the Textile Study Room to see other examples of its kind will give the reader a greater understanding of the subject. So also with the text. In the limited space available it is impossible to cover the vast and varied subject of textiles in any detail. Only the most salient points are mentioned; further information may be found by consulting the books listed in the bibliography.

The measurements given are those of the bouquet illustrated.

SILK DAMASK

Italian, 16th Century

FROM the 14th to the 17th century Italy was the centre of European silk weaving. Lucca, Venice, and Florence, her most important weaving cities, supplied the rest of Europe with their luxury fabrics—velvets, damasks, and brocades.

The bouquet shown here is from a 16th century Italian silk. Its very symmetrical arrangement of stylized flowers illustrates the final phase of a development in design which had its beginning three centuries earlier.

With the rise of Italy as a silk weaving centre there also came a change in design, deriving from the influence of Chinese silks. For centuries western textile design had been symmetrical and highly stylized, consisting most frequently of rondels with single or confronting birds, animals, or human figures. In the 13th century, when Persia came under Mongol domination, a flourishing trade opened up between East and West, and many beautiful Chinese silks were imported into Persia and from there on to Italy. The flowing Chinese designs, filled with naturalistic flowers and foliage, leaping beasts and flying birds, so different from the symmetrical western designs, inspired western weavers. Lucchese and Venetian silks of the 14th century are full of Chinese motifs—the phoenix, the khilin, and the lotus palmette.

The lotus palmette was the inspiration for the most characteristic motif of Italian velvets of the 15th century—the highly stylized and symmetrical pattern often called the “pomegranate.” This motif, placed in an ogival compartment, is found in endless variations. In some there are all-over repeats of the motif in a fairly simple form woven in damask or voided cut velvet. In others the pomegranate motif and its compartment are far more elaborate in design, and are usually placed on a curved, decorated band against a rich background of stylized foliage. There are variations of the pomegranate motif in the cases of Italian silks in the Textile Galleries of the Museum. Its use in textiles for costume and interior decoration may be seen in Italian and Flemish painting of the 15th century, particularly those of Gozzoli, Crivelli, Giovanni Bellini, Memling, and Roger Van der Weyden.

In the 16th century there was a noticeable turn to more naturalistic forms. The division of the ground into compartments continued, but frequently a vase of flowers like that shown here was to be found within instead of the pomegranate. This was a beginning of the long reign of flowers in textile design.

925.22.27

H. 8", W. 6½"



NEEDLEPOINT LACE

Venetian, 17th Century

THERE are two types of true lace, needlepoint and bobbin or pillow lace. Both are made of very fine linen thread; silk, gold, and silver threads may also be used. Needlepoint, as the name implies, is worked with a needle, usually in buttonhole stitch. It had its origin in drawn and cut work in which some warp and weft threads were drawn out and those remaining worked over, drawn together into patterns, and held with overcasting or buttonholing. Later the ground fabric was discarded and the threads forming the basic structure of the design were tacked down on to parchment on which the design was drawn.

Once lace designing was free from the limitations of the vertical and horizontal fabric threads, much more elaborate and flowing patterns were possible. This style reached its highest form in the Venetian rosepoint laces of the 17th century. The lace bouquet shown here illustrates how free and naturalistic needlepoint lace designs had become at that time.

The origin of bobbin lace is not known; it possibly had its beginnings in plaiting and twisting the warp ends of a fabric into a patterned fringe. The technique is one of twisting and plaiting a great number of threads in combinations planned to create a specific design. The design is drawn on parchment and the outline of each motif perforated. Pins are placed in the perforations, and the threads looped around them, so that the twisting and plaiting conforms with the design. A pillow is required on which to place the pattern for pinning; the lengths of thread are wound around bobbins to prevent tangling and also provide tension by their weight. From these devices the lace got its name.

Where bobbin lace originated is still an unsettled point, both Italy and Flanders claiming the honour. In Milan and Genoa many handsome bobbin laces were produced in the 17th century, but the finest of all time were those of France and Flanders in the early 18th. The thread used was exceedingly fine and the designs very elaborate. From the second half of the 16th century to late in the 18th this costly fabric was fashionable with both men and women. Large quantities of needlepoint lace went into the ruffs of Elizabethan England, the falling collars and ruffles of the 17th century, and even greater quantities of pillow lace were used for collar and sleeve ruffles in the following century.

The display of laces in the Textile Gallery illustrates all the most important types of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.

911.2.7. Chick Collection. Gift of Mrs. H. D. Warren

H. 6¼", W. 4¼"



EMBROIDERY

English, about 1700

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY was one of great change in the field of textiles. The most striking and important change was that from the stately symmetrical designs of the Renaissance to the flowing naturalistic forms of the "Baroque" style. This style, spreading north from Italy, influenced many forms of textile design—tapestry, lace, and embroidery. English embroidery is a most notable example. Elizabethan work has a character all its own. It is stylized and usually symmetrical. As the 17th century advanced the floral motifs—always favourites in England—became more naturalistic, with gracefully curving stems and foliage and delicate shading. This treatment is very evident in the ewer of flowers illustrated here. It is full of lively movement. The flowers and foliage are worked in long and short stitch, a stitch perfectly suited to shaded effects. They are outlined with stem stitch. The ewer is almost entirely worked in couching with a variety of gold, silver, and silk threads.

Of equal importance at this period was the development of the silk weaving industry in France. Some silk weaving had been done in France since mediaeval times, but the country had been dependent on Italy for elaborate velvets, damasks, and brocades. Several unsuccessful attempts had been made to establish a silk weaving industry by bringing in weavers, equipment, and material. The great trading city of Lyons had been chosen for these ventures—not an ideal choice, for Lyons was not a weaving centre, but was the centre of the Italian silk trade. The silk merchants, foreseeing the loss of their business, opposed this new industry very strongly. Furthermore, sufficient financial support from the Crown was lacking for it.

At the beginning of the 17th century two important events occurred. The first was the establishment of sericulture (the raising of silk worms) in France, freeing that country from its dependence on Italy for silk yarn. The second was the invention by Claude Dagon of a loom, basically an improved form of the Italian drawloom, on which the most complicated patterns could be woven. Strong support from the Crown and wise guidance by Colbert, Louis XIV's able minister, raised the industry to the leading position in Europe by the end of the century.

911.2.6. Chick Collection. Gift of Mrs. H. D. Warren

H. 12½", W. 10"



EMBROIDERED BEDSPREAD

English, early 18th Century

EMBROIDERY is the textile art least fettered by technical limitations. The same design may be treated in many different ways from formal to naturalistic, and it is in the latter that embroidery is most delightful. Its characteristics typify the 18th century, and some of the most beautiful textiles of the period are embroideries, particularly those of England. There are three main types:

The earliest, appearing first in the late 17th century, is crewel work. This, usually used for bed furniture or wall hangings, was worked with coloured worsted wools called crewels on linen or a linen and cotton twill. The designs were of meandering branches bearing exotic flowers and curling leaves, similar to Indian chintz designs of the period. The earlier ones were worked in a variety of stitches; those of the early 18th century almost entirely in chain stitch. A charming English bedspread in the Museum's collections is worked with crewels in chain stitch on a fine quilted ground. Much quilting was done at this period, either as the sole decoration or in combination with other types of embroidery.

The second popular type was tent stitch embroidery on a canvas ground. This solid stitching was very strong and was used chiefly for upholstery. Large numbers of chair coverings were produced, the favourite motif being a bouquet of flowers usually tied with red or blue ribbons—like the chintz bouquet on page 15.

By far the most luxurious and beautiful embroidery was that worked in satin and long and short stitches on fine silks. In these the most naturalistic effects were produced. The basket of flowers in the style of Monnoyer shown here is the central motif on a very handsome bedspread in the Museum's collection. The border is equally rich with a similar basket in each corner and cornucopia between, all overflowing with a most interesting mixture of flowers and foliage—irises, parrot tulips, crocuses, holly, and others. It is worked on a white satin quilted ground, and as a final touch of luxury the diagonal rows of quilting have been covered with couched silver thread.

This type of embroidery was most popular as costume decoration. Embroidered dresses and aprons were very fashionable. (The latter, needless to say, were more decorative than practical.) Men's suits and waistcoats were often embroidered. A suit in the Museum's collection of sky-blue velvet has cuffs, collar, pockets and front edges richly embroidered with silver thread. The entire suit is scattered with silver sequins.

923.4.56.

H. 1'8½", W. 1'1"



TAPESTRY PANEL

English, 18th Century

SINCE mediaeval times Europe has been famous for her fine tapestries. Woven of coloured wools, often enriched with gold, silver, and silk threads, they served both as decoration and as insulation against the cold in drafty stone buildings. Tapestry weaving is a slow and exacting technique which can only be done by hand. Tapestries were, and still are, costly to produce, and have always been a luxury product.

The great period of tapestry weaving began in the 14th and 15th centuries—the Gothic period. The most important centres were in France and Flanders, at Arras, Tournai, and later Brussels. Tapestries were usually woven in sets to be hung loosely around a room or suite of rooms. Their designs were religious and historical scenes and scenes of everyday life. They were carried out in a simple and decorative manner with few colours; sometimes several scenes were depicted in one tapestry, as in the early 16th century Flemish tapestry “Scenes from the Trojan War,” in this Museum.

In the 16th century the Renaissance style becomes apparent. Raphael, and later Rubens and other painters, made designs for tapestries which were virtually paintings. From this time on tapestries were no longer decorative designs but pictures, and as such were fitted into panels rather than hung loosely on walls. Frequently furniture was upholstered with tapestry to match. The tapestry panel shown here may have been designed as a chair covering or a fire screen. It is English and probably woven at Soho. The informal arrangement of spring flowers is a favourite one of the period and rather similar to that on the English embroidered bedspread on page 9.

The first serious attempt to establish tapestry weaving in England was made late in the 16th century by William Sheldon. His tapestries were for the most part small, suitable for cushion covers, and within the means of those who could not afford the imported article. He was followed by the Mortlake factory, established under the patronage of James I. This factory produced many handsome sets of tapestries, but the 17th century was a stormy period in England and the factory suffered many setbacks. Most of the weavers had come from Flanders, and from time to time one or more would leave Mortlake and set up their own small factories. The Soho factory which flourished in London in the 18th century probably developed in this way.

950.97.12. Gift of Miss Mary Plummer

H. 2', W. 1'10"



BROCADED SATIN

French, mid-18th Century

DURING the 18th century France was the most important centre of silk weaving in Europe. The master craftsmen of Lyons produced a brilliant variety of flowery silks and satins which were among the most beautiful silks ever made. Improvements in weaving methods and ingenuity on the part of the designers made it possible to weave the very naturalistic effects of light and shade so desirable for sprays, bouquets, garlands, and sprigs, characteristic of textile design of this period.

Though these motifs were favourites right through the century, the general style of design changed considerably. Silks of the first part of the century were extremely rich. Nearly every square inch of fabric was covered with elaborately brocaded bouquets and garlands in which lavish use was made of gold and silver threads and chenille. As the century advanced designs became lighter and airier. More attention was paid to the ground fabric, which was either a plain weave or delicately figured. Upon this were brocaded meandering garlands, ribbons and laces, dainty bouquets, and sprays of flowers. These charming and very feminine designs were characteristic of the middle of the 18th century. The bouquet illustrated here is of that period. It is a very rich piece of weaving in which the background is entirely of silver threads of different types. The bouquet itself, like many found in brocades, is a simple one containing only one rose and a few small flowers.

Vertical stripes begin to appear in the second half of the century. At first, they were faintly suggested in the background of the design, but during the reign of Louis XVI they became a dominating feature. Meanwhile the floral motifs diminished in size and importance until they were little more than spots of pattern on the stripes.

This monotonous later period in the history of European silks was gloriously relieved by the magnificent productions of Philippe de Lasalle (1723-1803), the greatest textile designer craftsman of the 18th century. Flowers were his chief motifs. They either formed the whole design or were a secondary theme to medallions containing rustic figures, birds, groups of garden tools, or musical instruments. These brocades, intended as wall coverings, were designs of great dignity and elegance, and were in keeping with the palaces and chateaux for which they were designed.

934.4.396. The Harry Wearne Collection. Gift of Mrs. Harry Wearne

H. 7½", W. 5½"



HAND PAINTED AND RESIST DYED COTTON

Indian, second quarter of the 18th Century

THE TEXTILES for which India was most famous in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries were her fine cottons, particularly those decorated with hand painted and resist dyed designs of exotic flowers, called chintzes. Chintz, a familiar word to us today comes from a Hindu word "Chint" or "Chitte" meaning spotted or variegated and came into our vocabulary in the 17th century.

Of the early designs we know very little, but judging by the documentary evidence their popularity did not last long. Directions, advice, and even patterns were soon being sent out to India to induce the Indian craftsmen to produce chintzes pleasing to the European taste. The designs are a curious mixture of East and West. Two favourite sources for the flowering branch and tree designs of this period were designs from Chinese porcelain and lacquer imported into England in the 17th century, and English embroidery patterns. The Harry Wearne Collection of chintzes in this Museum illustrates how this motif continued to be popular for wall hangings, curtains, and bedspreads, reflecting the changing fashions from the richly flowered branches of the beginning of the 18th century to the slender and carefully pruned trees of its later part.

The bouquet illustrated here is a detail from a bedspread with a bouquet in each corner and one in the centre. It is of particular interest because it is one of the few instances of which the source of the design is known. Each bouquet is different and they have been taken from a set of twelve engravings called "The Twelve Months of Flowers," published by Robert Furber, a Kensington nurseryman, in 1730. The one shown is from the month of June.

For costumes there were all-over repeated floral designs. These reached Europe either in the form of panels or in lengths, and were in demand by both men and women—for dressing gowns for the former and dresses for the latter. As with the flowering tree design, the patterns reflected contemporary European taste; in some instances the designs were possibly copied from French brocades. The lace-like patterns of about 1700, the rococo motifs of the mid-century, and the stripes of its second half, all appear in the costume chintzes.

934.4.16. The Harry Wearne Collection. Gift of Mrs. Harry Wearne

H. 2' 1", W. 1' 5"



COPPERPLATE PRINTED COTTON

French, Oberkampf Factory, about 1789

THE EARLY mediaeval and Renaissance printed textiles were simple and their colours dull and fugitive, but they provided a patterned fabric where the use of woven silks would be too extravagant or too costly.

It was not until the arrival of chintzes from India in the 17th century, with their fast and brilliant colours, that a fresh impetus was given to textile printing. Chintzes, however, were expensive, and it was not long before attempts were made to provide a similar article by the quicker and cheaper woodblock printing process. The most serious handicap was the lack of knowledge of mordant dying, the secret of the fast Indian colours. Nevertheless it is evident that like the chintzes the printed cottons were very fashionable. The silk weavers in France and wool and linen weavers in England complained that these gay practical fabrics were ruining their business. These industries were vital to their respective countries and their complaints were listened to. In 1686 a ban was laid in France on the importation of chintz and the manufacture of printed cottons. In 1700–1 a similar ban was laid in England. To no avail: it was lifted in France in 1759 and in England in 1774. Time had not been wasted; mordanting was now fully understood by this date, and a glorious array of printed cottons flowed on the market.

The most famous French factory was the Oberkampf factory at Jouy-en-Josas near Versailles. From here the name “Toile de Jouy” has come down to us today. We associate it with pastoral scenes found in drapery materials, many of which are copies or adaptations of copperplate designs for which the Oberkampf factory was famous. The basket of flowers on this page is a detail from a piece called the “Franklin Medallion.”

The earliest reference to the use of copperplates for textile printing is from Ireland in 1756; the method was in use in England in 1761. The Oberkampf factory installed copperplate printing equipment in 1770, but it was not until 1783 when the artist Jean Baptiste Huet joined the factory that the full possibilities of the technique were realized. Each year until his death in 1811 Huet produced a limited number of designs. Some were pastoral, others like the “Franklin Medallion” itself illustrated current events of interest. Copperplate prints were the *pièces de résistance* of the printing factories but the bulk of their productions were woodblock printed cottons. The design of these ranged from tiny floral sprigs to large flower and garland patterns for house furnishings.

934.4.447. The Harry Wearne Collection. Gift of Mrs. Harry Wearne.

H. 6", W. 5"



VOIDED VELVET

Chinese, for the European market, late 18th or early 19th Century

THE EAST has long held an exotic attraction for the West. This is understandable; it was from China that many of our luxuries originally came—silk, porcelain, lacquer, to name only three. Their designs appeared exotic to Westerners but their charm was short lived; it was not long before European styles and motifs began to modify them. This modification can be seen in both the articles made in China for the export market, called “export ware,” and in those made in Europe but copying Chinese designs and called “chinoiserie.”

In the field of textiles there have been two great periods of Chinese influence. The first, in the 14th century, has already been described in the section on Italian silks. The other great period began in the 17th century with the further opening up of trade with the East via the Cape of Good Hope. It is important that it was not Chinese textile design but the designs on Chinese porcelain and lacquer that inspired the European textile chinoiserie referred to above. This inspiration lasted right through the 18th century and can be found in every branch of the textile arts. Exotic flowers, foliage imitating bamboo, pagodas, fantastic architecture, and quaint figures are there in great variety.

The two most important kinds of decorative textiles produced in China for the European market during the 18th century were embroideries and painted silks. There is in the Museum's collection a beautiful mid-18th century lady's dress of Chinese painted silk in a charming design of meandering sprays of flowers. An important pair of hangings also in the collections date from the early 18th century. Both are Chinese; one is painted silk, the other an embroidered satin, and both are drawn from the same pattern—a flowering tree design sent by a European, perhaps an Englishman in India, to another in China to be executed there.

The illustration is of a more rare type of export textile. It is a voided velvet. The great period of velvet weaving in Europe was during the 15th and 16th centuries. Magnificent examples have come down from the 17th and 18th centuries too, although brocades were the fashion. Fine velvet weaving was also done in China throughout this period and into the 19th century. This piece is of bright yellow silk. The pattern standing out in cut pile against a twill ground, is only faintly Chinese, but a very Chinese characteristic is the arrangement of vases in horizontal rows.

909.16.16

H. 10", W. 5"



WOODBLOCK PRINTED COTTON

French, Japuis et Fils, 1851

WELL BEFORE the 18th century ended, the enthusiasm for an abundance of floral ornament had spent itself. By 1800 there was, instead, a taste for classical motifs derived from architectural ornament, stately designs of palm leaves and olive branches, small spot motifs, or simple stripes: these are associated with the Directoire period in France and the Regency in England. By the middle of the 19th century a complete change had taken place. Flowers once more dominated decoration, particularly on wall-papers, printed cottons, and wall to wall carpeting. Where restraint, dignity, and simplicity had been the main characteristics of the earlier period, profusion and confusion reigned. Cabbage roses, hydrangeas, oriental poppies, and other showy flowers were the popular favourites, usually drawn life size or over, and depicted in vast flowing bouquets.

The realism with which each detail was required to be drawn demanded great technical skill. Never have woodblock cutting and printing reached the technical heights they did in the glazed printed cottons designed for household furnishings in the mid 19th century. The illustration shows a first-rate example. It was designed by the Paris firm of Japuis et Fils, for the Great Exhibition of 1851 at the Crystal Palace in London, and is described in the catalogue by the following words: "The specimen of French chintz which we now engrave is a favourable example of the taste and propriety of design bestowed by our Continental neighbours upon articles which, in our own country, have long been characterized by an absence of that essential quality."

It is interesting to note in passing that the word "chintz" is used here in its modern, not in its 18th century meaning. Technically, the piece is a *tour de force*. There are fifteen basic colours each requiring a block or set of blocks, which, with overprinting, produce a wide range of tones and shades.

The colour scheme is gay. On a chocolate brown background the reds, pinks, and creamy shades of the roses, poppies, and peonies, tied together with a deep sky-blue ribbon, stand out in strong contrast. With the introduction of aniline dyes in 1856 and later of coal tar dyes a new range of colours came into existence—first a brilliant harsh mauve, then vibrating blues, pinks, and greens, until by the end of the century the old vegetable, animal, and mineral dyes—indigo, madder, cochineal, and iron—had been entirely replaced by chemical dyes.

934.4.445.b. The Harry Wearne Collection. Gift of Mrs. Harry Wearne

H. 4'5", W. 3'2½"



